



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., proposes \$100 million bond issue to build police, judicial complexes, tribal casino

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – In his first State of the Navajo Nation address of his second term, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., said strengthening the Navajo economy is the most important thing the Navajo government can do, and that it would remain one of his top priorities.

Before a standing-room-only audience in the historic Navajo Nation Council Chamber, President Shirley congratulated Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan on his re-election to his third consecutive term as Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council, each of the delegates on their election to office, and asked the Council to welcome his new Vice President, Ben Shelly, who served 16 years on the Council.

“I am pleased and proud to have him working alongside me now, and he will be visiting with his old friends and colleagues across the street frequently,” the President said.

In addressing the first session of the 21st Council, the President tipped his hat to the preceding Council, noting the historic legislation it approved. This includes the signing of the San Juan River Water Settlement Agreement, the end of the Bennett Freeze, the protection of the San Francisco Peaks, the creation of the Navajo Nation Board of Education and Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise, the approval of the \$2.5 billion Desert Rock Energy Project, the decriminalization of azee (peyote), and the confirmation of two Navajo Supreme Court justices – Chief Justice Herb Yazzie and the late Chief Justice Claudeen Bates Arthur.

The President’s address was accepted by an overwhelming vote of 68 to 10.

The President said he would soon recommend legislation and called upon the Navajo Nation Council to approve a

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\$100 million bond to build two judicial and police complexes, and a Navajo casino.

The proposed judicial complexes would include courts, detention facilities, prosecution and probation services, he said. The proposed casino would help pay the debt service on the bond. He said a significant amount of work has already been done by a work group composed of the Division of Public Safety, the Department of Corrections, the Prosecutor’s Office, and representatives of the Judicial Branch.

“This group has prioritized the development of the Tuba City and Crownpoint complexes, and I support its recommendation.” He said. “Our administration is fast-tracking this legislative agenda item.”

He said the Division of Economic Development and the Department of Justice have worked to implement the new Navajo Nation Business Site Leasing Regulations, and that the Navajo Business Management Plan is nearly complete.

He said the reorganization of the Division of Economic Development to properly administer business site leasing functions is complete and that a Real Estate Department, Appraisal Office, Environmental Review Office, and a Records Management Office to record all business site leases have been created.

Regarding the 40-year-old Bennett Freeze, President Shirley said he was grateful to see the development prohibition finally come to an end, and that now the Council needed to support efforts to rehabilitate the area.

“Our people there are now free to live as other Navajos do by repairing their homes or constructing new ones, developing businesses, and rebuilding their lives after two generations of living in a legal straitjacket,” he said. “There is no greater role for all of us than to assist with the rehabilitation of the entire 1.5 million acre area.”

He encouraged local leaders to work closely with the Navajo Division of Community Development and the Community Development Block Grant Program. Getting resources and infrastructure for the area will take a coordinated effort, he said. He said his administration would work with the Indian Health Service to prioritize water and sanitation projects under the U.S. Public Health Service water and sanitation program.

Regarding the Nation’s gaming initiatives, the President said he regretted that gaming was taking longer than expected to begin on the Navajo Nation. He announced that he would soon forward to the Council for confirmation the names of his selections for the new nine-member Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise Board of Directors.

“It is unfortunate that this work must be done so painstakingly, and carefully, and I assure you that no one more than I regrets that we don’t have six casinos with filled parking lots operating right now,” he said.

Regarding his recent veto of the Tse’Daa’Kaan Chapter Gaming Enterprise resolution, he explained that separate chapter gaming enterprises would harm the interests of the Navajo Nation and violate gaming compacts between the Nation and the states of Arizona and New Mexico.

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– Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr.

“As leaders of the Navajo Nation, it is our duty to protect and represent the interests of not only our individual communities, but the *entire* Navajo Nation,” he said.

The President noted the promising circumstances involving the re-elections of Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, whom he said “have been exceptional friends to the Navajo people and the Navajo Nation.”

Both governors have worked closely with the Shirley Administration over the last four years. Gov. Napolitano is the only Arizona governor to conduct a series of quarterly meetings with tribal leaders on topics critical to Arizona tribes. Gov. Richardson created the first cabinet-level position for Indian affairs.

The President congratulated both on their re-elections, and wished Gov. Richardson success as he seeks to become the first Hispanic President of the United States.

Regarding his \$100 million bond proposal, President Shirley said he has directed his staff and the Navajo Nation Controller to prepare for issuance of the bond, with approval from the Navajo Nation Council.

“With your support, I believe that we can implement a long-term plan to address the immediate needs of our Judicial Branch without detrimentally impacting the

Executive Branch, and causing harm to both our people and our Nation,” the President told the Council.

Regarding his veto of the Judicial Branch Appropriation Act, he explained that the law would have caused layoffs of about 200 Navajo Nation employees. He said that while he is not indifferent to the needs of the Judicial Branch, his bond proposal would help construct new facilities while not harming other branches of government.

The President said he would soon issue an executive order to authorize a voluntary physical fitness program to encourage all tribal employees to exercise as a way to prevent the onset of diabetes.

“Diabetes is an epidemic in Native America,” he said. “According to the Navajo Area Diabetes Prevalence Data Source, the occurrence of diabetes among Navajos has increased 30 percent since 1997. Additionally, over the last few years approximately 55 percent of all Navajos who have died suffered from diabetes-related complications.”

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